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FOR NEA/FO - GRAY; NEA/MAG - HOPKINS AND HARRIS
NSC FOR ABRAMS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2017

TAGS: PREL PTER TS

SUBJECT: COURTESY CALL ON MINISTER OF INTERIOR REVEALS FEW
NEW DETAILS ABOUT SALAFIST THREAT

REF: A. TUNIS 53
1B. TUNIS 44 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) In a January 9 courtesy call, Minister of Interior and Local Development Rafik Belhaj Kacem revealed few new details about the recent Salafist threat in Tunisia (reftels). After initial introductions, the Ambassador broached the subject of the recent threat, underscoring the USG's concern and asking if the Minister had any additional information about the group and its intended targets. Kacem's response largely repeated the information Minister of State Ben Dhaia had provided in his January 8 meeting with the Ambassador (ref A). However, Kacem projected more confidence than did Ben Dhaia (who qualified that he spoke in "quasi-certitude") in asserting that the GOT had successfully eradicated the group.

In addition, Kacem's briefing included the following additional elements: that one of the members of the group was Mauritanian; and that the security forces had retrieved documents containing information on explosives and how to make IED's of various types.

12. (S) Comment: We were disappointed that Kacem appeared to consider this meeting strictly as a courtesy call (which it indeed was), rather than an opportunity to share concrete information, since we had been told that the Minister would provide more thorough details pertaining to the threat. The Ambassador pressed Kacem for better cooperation, as did SIMO, who, in response to Kacem's characterization of the US-Tunisian liaison relationship as "exemplary," made clear that we had been disappointed by the lack of information shared. We will continue to use every opportunity to press GOT counterparts on this score. In addition, in the coming days we will be transmitting to the Department two messages: one that summarizes our understanding of recent events and their implications; another will put forward a series of recommendations on how to move forward. End Comment.
GODEC